



## George Hughes – The Politics of Identity at Buffalo Arts Studio



by Dana Tyrrell

February 22, 2018, 6:39 pm

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Within portraiture, historic representations of people of color have been assigned to stultifying presences within the frame; at the edge and never the center. Be it as the servant, the slave, or the slain, representations of black bodies, specifically, have been in roles of subjugation. It becomes vital to see, then, how artists such as George Afedzi Hughes work to both confront this malignant history within their own art practice, as well as attempt to move beyond it.

A survey of Hughes' paintings spanning the length of the twenty-first century (up to this point) is on view now at Buffalo Arts Studio in a rare double-gallery exhibit titled *The Politics of Identity*. Hughes is a Ghanaian-born American working in the visual and performing arts, while also operating within the world of academia, and his most recent work serves as a keyhole which glances upon how the artist grapples with his manifold, and potentially fraught, identity politics.

Within the first gallery of Buffalo Arts Studio is Hughes' most recent body of work. Spanning the last couple of years, these tight, illustrative and traditionally constructed paintings speak to the thesis of the entire exhibit, which becomes a self-portrait of the artist as a hybrid. The locus of a singular identity within Hughes' artwork becomes challenging since each of the figures represented therein are by turns effaced, flattened, decapitated, amputated and presented within the same visual plane as skeletal schematics. This blunting of the body speaks to the many ways in which representations of African-ness is both possible and eschewed within portraiture, but it also speaks to the limits of bodies and their allotted agency within a visual plane.



On left – "Bones and muscles", 2017, 70"x48" | On right – "Genealogy" 2001, 68"x124"



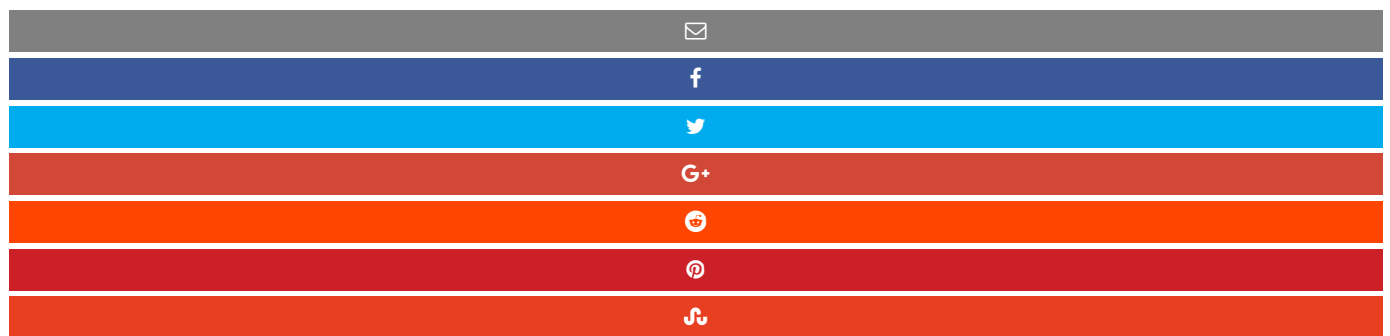
After Party –  
2017, Hughes

The second gallery – showcasing Hughes’ work from the early aughts – is more circumspect in both how it depicts landmarks of identity and how they are in turn picked apart. These canvases, which are panoramic in their length; unstretched with raw edges, they sag under their own accumulative weight. This series of paintings is more outwardly violent, calling to mind the wrath Francis Bacon would inflict upon a surface through his brushstrokes, as well as narratively driven, recalling the best of Rauschenberg’s work from the 1950s and 60s, with their collaged, worked over surfaces and constituent detritus.

These paintings present a more reflective Hughes, who imbues the paintings with what may be images of his family, as well as signs and symbols which point toward the platonic ideal of belonging, whole also reconciling his ancestral and genealogical truths. These paintings work in a register closer toward archaeology, than the architectural and cool paintings of the previous gallery. They gesticulate – wildly, eagerly, emphatically – toward bodies realized, forgotten and subsumed within the mechanizations of time.

*The Politics of Identity* is on view now at Buffalo Arts Studio, through March 3, 2018. Hughes will be giving an artist talk and will be discussing the exhibit at 6pm on Friday, February 23, as part of Buffalo Arts Studio’s M&T Fourth Friday programming. More information can be found at [buffaloartsstudio.org](http://buffaloartsstudio.org)

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